Memo

Date: December 2, 2013

To: State Coastal Conservancy Board

From: Sam Schuchat, Executive Officer
Mary Small, Deputy Executive Officer

CC: Oversight Members

RE: The Role of Planning in Accomplishing the Conservancy's Mission and Strategic Plan Goals

The purpose of this memo is to explain to the Coastal Conservancy Board the important role of transparent, science-based planning in helping to establish conservation priorities and build partnerships to achieve statewide resource conservation goals. This memo will provide the Coastal Conservancy with some additional information about the context in which specific project recommendations come before the Conservancy. Occasionally, members of the Conservancy Board have asked why we need to fund or support planning studies. The Conservancy supports planning, with both funding and staff technical assistance, for three reasons: 1) to identify specific priority projects under our Strategic Plan; 2) to bring together large groups of stakeholders around a common vision of coastal resource protection that will be implemented over the long-term; and 3) to leverage other funding sources to implement priority projects that achieve statewide goals.

This memo presents examples of prioritization plans that have been supported by the Coastal Conservancy. In addition to plans developed with Conservancy support, this memo also discusses some of the existing statewide and regional plans under which the Conservancy operates. The Conservancy also funds specific site planning and design to develop projects so they are ready for implementation. Such project planning has been an important strategy in leveraging Conservancy resources; often a small initial investment in a site plan will enable project partners to obtain significant matching funds for implementation. However, the focus of this memo is on broader planning efforts, in particular those plans that identify specific priorities to achieve statewide goals.

A great deal of work has been done by local governments, stakeholders, scientists and other partners to identify specific priority projects that achieve statewide coastal resource conservation goals. Conservancy staff supports these planning efforts and uses them to inform recommendations for projects. Staff will convert this memo into a webpage with links to these plans. Starting in 2014, we will also direct staff to explicitly discuss the planning context for all recommended approvals as part of all staff recommendations.

Background

The Coastal Conservancy was created in 1976 as part of a comprehensive strategy to protect California's coastal resources for the benefit of all Californians. A unique strength of California's strategy for coastal protection is that it does not rely only on regulation; the Conservancy was established out of the belief that some conservation objectives are better reached through collaboration. The Conservancy is directed to work proactively to solve problems and implement projects that 1) protect coastal resources including urban waterfronts and agricultural lands, 2) expand public access to the coast, and 3) enhance natural resources. The Conservancy's mission is to work collaboratively with other partners to achieve statewide coastal resource protection goals. Implicit in this approach is the need to bring people together to develop plans that lay out a vision for the future and identify specific priority activities to achieve that vision.

The Conservancy is charged with achieving a number of statewide coastal goals, including protecting land, enhancing habitat, improving public access, and preparing for impacts of climate change. The Conservancy implements the overarching statewide goals of the Coastal Act, the agency's enabling legislation and Strategic Plan, and other state policies by supporting regional planning to identify specific goals and priority projects. Key to the Coastal Conservancy's success has been its work with nonprofit organizations, local governments, scientists, other agencies, and the public to develop clear goals and a long-term shared vision for coastal resource protection in California. One of the key roles of the Conservancy is to bring scientific expertise and statewide perspective to local and regional planning efforts to protect coastal resources that benefit all Californians. The Conservancy has provided staff support and grant funds for many planning efforts. By engaging partners in transparent planning processes, the Conservancy has identified and implemented strategic priorities all along the California coast and in the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area.

Since its inception, the Coastal Conservancy has sought to strategically use its limited resources to maximize protection and enhancement of California's coastal resources. Many of these plans were incrementally implemented over the succeeding decades as resources became available and project opportunities unfolded. When significant bond funds became available to the Coastal Conservancy starting in 2001, the agency was able to quickly and successfully implement many projects that had already been identified in state-supported prioritization plans.

Identifying Statewide Priorities at the Regional Scale

The Coastal Conservancy is a state agency and is charged with implementing projects that achieve statewide goals. However, as articulated in our Strategic Plan, we recognize the unique features, challenges and opportunities of the different regions of the state. California's coastal areas are incredibly diverse in all measures: geography, population distribution, economy, and resources. Much of the Conservancy's planning work is at the regional scale where plans can be specific enough to inform action and broad enough to identify priorities.

Planning at the appropriate geographic scale and around appropriate focal areas is critical to developing useful, actionable plans. Statewide plans can be useful for establishing broad goals, but they typically lack the specificity to evaluate specific priority actions. As an example, the statewide *California Wildlife Action Plan* (currently being updated by California Department of Fish and Wildlife) provides general

recommendations for action such as "(s)tate and federal agencies should work with cities and counties to secure sensitive habitats and key habitat linkages (p.32)". The Wildlife Action Plan discusses general priorities for each of the state's ecoregions but recommends development of more focused regional planning to identify specific priorities, actions and projects. Another statewide plan is the *Essential Habitat Connectivity Project*, commissioned by the California Department of Transportation and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife to identify large remaining blocks of intact habitat and to model important habitat corridors between these blocks. Analysis was conducted with statewide data and as a result the project only looked at habitat blocks of at least 2,000 acres. Due to the coarse nature of the analysis, the plan recommends additional work at the regional scale. Regional plans such as the *South Coast Missing Linkages* and *Critical Linkages: Bay Area and Beyond* compliment the statewide plan and identify specific on-the-ground priorities and implementation strategies for wildlife linkages.

One of the strengths of the Conservancy is that through its diverse mission, it has worked on integrated, multiple objective plans and projects, such as plans identifying both public access and habitat enhancement priorities in a watershed. For purposes of organization this memo provides examples of four different types of plans that the Conservancy has helped develop and implement:

- Land Conservation
- Habitat Enhancement
- Public Access and Trails
- Plans to Prepare for the Impacts of Climate Change

However, there is often overlap between these types of plans and many plans cover more than one of these focal areas.

Land Conservation

To guide acquisition decisions, the Coastal Conservancy has led and supported many rigorous and scientific conservation planning efforts. These plans are grounded in conservation science and developed through transparent processes, providing appropriate involvement and input by key non-state partners. The Conservancy has supported, helped develop, and helped implement land conservation plans at a variety of landscape scales. Table 1 lists some of the conservation plans that the Conservancy has helped develop and implement, as well as other plans used by the Conservancy in its work.

An example of a Conservancy-supported planning effort is The Conservation Fund's *Conservation Prospects for the North Coast*, completed in 2005. The stated purpose of the project was to "develop a regional perspective and provide a basis for implementing comprehensive conservation programs that address the many complex and compelling conservation opportunities on the North Coast." The project reviewed and synthesized the recommendations from more than 150 local and regional planning efforts and provided conservation strategies across the five-county region. As a result, The Conservation Fund was able to provide a "big picture" context to local plans and identify specific conservation priorities. Subsequent acquisition projects by the The Conservation Fund and funded by the Conservancy implemented the conservation priorities identified in this plan.

The *Conservation Lands Network* is one example of a regional planning effort the Conservancy helped support and implement. This science-based study was led by the Bay Area Open Space Council and brought together more than 125 organizations and individuals to identify the most essential lands needed to sustain the "natural infrastructure" of the Bay Area. The plan covered an area of 4.3 million acres and over 1,000 variables were considered – from redwood forests to California red-legged frog habitat, from climate change to migratory routes. The Conservancy was an early and ongoing supporter and funder of this effort along with several other foundations and public agencies. The Conservation Lands Network map, report, and interactive on-line map were released in 2011 and are available to land managers, legislators and local planners to help them make informed and integrated decisions and regularly assess the region's progress towards these goals.

The resulting plan and associated mapping tool has been and is being used to guide investments in land conservation. First, it is used to refine priorities at a local or subregional level. Land trusts, open space districts, and others can use the results of Conservation Lands Network to better prioritize habitat types in need of conservation in their locale. Second, it is used to evaluate potential projects. The Conservancy, private foundations, and other funders (as well as the project proponent) can evaluate the importance of a given acquisition using Conservation Lands Network's interactive on-line mapping tool, Explorer. For example, the 1,500-acre Rockville Trails Estates acquisition in Solano County was assessed using Explorer and was determined to be a high priority based on its contribution to regional and landscape unit goals for specific habitat types on the property. The Conservancy awarded a grant for this acquisition in 2011.

Habitat Enhancement

The Conservancy has funded development of many science-based, comprehensive ecosystem management and habitat enhancement plans along the California coast and around the San Francisco Bay Area. These plans identify priority actions to restore and protect ecosystem functions and key habitats and usually one or more other objectives such as flood protection and public access. Habitat enhancement planning occurs at a variety of scales, from ecoregional plans to watershed enhancement plans to site-specific plans. The Conservancy has funded several studies identifying fish passage barriers, including the statewide *Inventory of Barriers to Fish Passage in Coastal Watersheds*. Table 2 lists habitat enhancement plans that the Conservancy has helped support as well as some of the important plans prepared by other agencies that the Conservancy regularly consults.

The *San Francisco Bay Subtidal Habitat Goals Report* was released in 2010, outlining a bold vision for the subtidal habitats of San Francisco Bay. Led by the Conservancy and prepared with many partners, the report presents a strong, non-regulatory vision for how to move forward with science-based subtidal research, protection, and restoration over the next 50 years. The report is the first comprehensive compilation of information about submerged areas in the Bay and has inspired a variety of in-the-water restoration efforts, including oyster, eelgrass, and living shoreline projects that benefit aquatic fish, invertebrates, and wildlife. Since its completion, the Conservancy and its partners have begun implementing several priority projects identified in the plan, including the living shorelines project and the creosote piling removal project. The first year monitoring results for the pilot native oyster restoration project have demonstrated significant success including growth of over two million oysters, an increased diversity of invertebrates, fish, and birds using the reef, and a 28% reduction of wave energy from the newly developed reef.

For the past 15 years, the Coastal Conservancy has staffed the Southern California Wetlands Recovery Project. The Wetlands Recovery Project is a regional collaboration that brings together 19 state and federal agencies to increase the pace and effectiveness of wetland restoration projects in the Southern California Bight, from Point Conception to Tijuana. The Wetlands Recovery Project's *Regional Strategy* and its *Work Plan* are documents developed with input from the member agencies and local stakeholders to identify wetland restoration priorities in the region. Currently the Regional Strategy is being updated to include considerations of climate change and to incorporate lessons learned from recently completed historical ecology studies.

The Conservancy has funded several historical ecology studies to inform the design of sustainable, resilient ecosystem restoration projects. California's coastal ecosystems have been irrevocably altered, so historical ecology studies do not provide a blueprint for restoration. Rather, these studies help us understand how systems performed prior to disturbance and to uncover both the landscape-scale patterns and local variability expressed by a system to guide effective restoration efforts. Historical ecology studies are powerful place-based tools for planning restoration in high priority areas.

The Conservancy has supported many plans that identify priority projects needed to restore ecosystem functions to an entire watershed. These plans create a blueprint for agreement among different stakeholders on a shared vision for the future. In the Navarro River Watershed, the Conservancy helped fund the watershed restoration plan and then relied on that plan to identify future projects. The Conservancy supported a multi-faceted approach over several phases of implementation. Projects completed under the program included riparian habitat restoration, a native plant nursery with the local high school, fish passage improvements, landowner workshops, road assessments and improvements to reduce sediment in tributaries, invasive species control, a best management practices vineyard certification program, and project monitoring. Through the development of the plan and its subsequent implementation, the Conservancy built trust among watershed landowners and added to the capacity of the Mendocino County Resource Conservation District to complete implementation of the plan using multiple funding sources.

Public Access and Trail Plans

The Conservancy has funded and participated in many public access plans along the Coast and around San Francisco Bay. These plans help develop the vision for regional access systems, such as the California Coastal Trail, the San Francisco Bay Trail, and others. The Conservancy has also funded many plans to build regional trails that link up with the Coastal Trail, primarily along river parkways. By having regional access plans, multiple partners can identify opportunities to complete missing segments of trail networks through direct acquisition, permit activities or other means. Thus, these plans not only help the Conservancy identify priority projects, they help leverage the resources of other partners as well. Table 3 lists some of the public access plans that the Coastal Conservancy has helped support and implement.

The Conservancy developed a statewide plan for completing the California Coastal Trail. This plan was useful in identifying important gaps in completing the statewide trail. However, the statewide plan lacked the level of detail needed to provide guidance as to what particular projects should be undertaken in specific places. As a result, the Conservancy has funded more detailed planning for the Coastal Trail at the regional scale. One example of a regional plan is the recently completed *Santa Cruz County Coastal Trail Master Plan*. This master plan identifies 20 specific trail segments that can be constructed and will be used to identify priority projects to be funded with $7 million of federal transportation grant funds.

The *Humboldt Bay Trails Feasibility Study* was funded by the Coastal Conservancy in 2000 and completed in 2001. This was a pioneering planning effort for trails in Humboldt Bay. When the study began many partners did not think there would be real public access opportunities along the Humboldt Bay Shoreline. Today there is a new trail-related group and the cities and other potential partners are engaged in implementing a regional trail. New coastal access has been provided along the Old Town waterfront in Eureka and the Hikshari Trail along the Elk River. With Conservancy assistance the City of Arcata has made significant progress on planning and designing a rail-with-trail segment of the Bay Trail & Coastal Trail between Arcata and Bracut Marsh. As a result of Coastal Commission requirements, Caltrans is working on completing a significant section of trail as part of Highway 1 improvements. The study also included recommendations for a Water Trail, and with Conservancy support plans are now being completed for new and upgraded facilities for nonmotorized boaters.

Plans to Prepare for Impacts of Climate Change

Over the past decade, California has become increasingly aware of the unavoidable impacts of climate change. The Coastal Conservancy is supporting several important regional efforts to plan for the changing climate. Again, the Conservancy's focus has been at the regional and local scale where information is specific enough to inform action. The Conservancy is working on updates to both the *Baylands Ecosystem Goals Report* and the *Southern California Wetland Recovery Project Regional Strategy* that consider climate change impacts in planning for future ecosystem restoration. The Conservancy is also working with several communities to assess vulnerability to sea level rise. Table 4 lists the plans the Coastal Conservancy is supporting that will help identify priority actions to prepare for the impacts of Climate Change.

The *Baylands Ecosystem Goals Report*, completed in 1999 by over 100 scientists and resource managers led by the US Environmental Protection Agency and the Regional Water Quality Control Board, identifies the types, amounts, and distribution of bayland habitats needed to sustain diverse and healthy communities of fish and wildlife. The report succeeded in articulating a vision for protecting and restoring 100,000 acres of wetland habitat in San Francisco Bay, and has become a key tool to support wetlands restoration. The Conservancy is now working with a comparable group of scientists and managers to produce a technical update to the report to incorporate an improved understanding of how climate change will affect the Bay's wetlands. This update will include specific recommendations for actions to address the impending and significant effects that climate change will have on the baylands, which provide essential habitat and tremendous benefits to wildlife and humans.

The *Humboldt Bay Sea Level Rise Adaptation Planning* Project is bringing together many land management agencies to conduct a regional vulnerability assessment, and to plan and implement adaptation projects. The first phase of the project, completed in January 2013, mapped the condition of the shoreline around Humboldt Bay and highlighted current threats of flooding due to potential failures of unmaintained dikes. The project made the community aware of existing flooding danger and built momentum for regional planning. The vulnerability assessment is still underway, but it has already helped the cities of Eureka and Arcata to secure additional funds for a Local Coastal Program update and to plan for a living shoreline project to protect the Arcata Wastewater Treatment Plant. The Adaptation Working Group formed as part of the project will continue meeting over the long term, coordinating adaptation policies of multiple jurisdictions with authority over hydrologically connected areas.

TABLE 1: Land Conservation Plans

Statewide
Coastal and Estuarine Land Conservation Plan
State Wildlife Action Plan
Essential Habitat Connectivity Strategy for Conserving a Connected California

North Coast
Mendocino County Coastal Conservation Plan

San Francisco Bay Area
San Francisco Bay Area Agricultural Sustainability Plan
San Francisco Bay Area Conservation Lands Network
San Francisco Bay Area Greenbelt: At-Risk Report (2012 Edition)
Critical Linkages: Bay Area and Beyond
East Contra Costa County Natural Community Conservation Plan

Central Coast
Conservation Blueprint for Santa Cruz County
Irish Hills Watersheds Conservation Plan
Santa Cruz Mountains Redwoods Conceptual Area Protection Plan
Elkhorn Slough Conservation Plan

Southern California
Southern California Wetlands Recovery Project Regional Strategy
Los Angeles Green Visions Plan
Orange County Natural Community Conservation Plan
Palos Verdes Peninsula Natural Community Conservation Plan
San Diego County Multiple Species Conservation Program
San Diego Multiple Habitat Conservation Program
San Diego North County Multiple Species Conservation Plan
San Diego River Conservation Plan

TABLE 2: Habitat Enhancement Plans

Statewide
Statewide Fish Barrier Assessment

North Coast
Klamath River Offshore Ecosystem Study
Humboldt Bay Regional *Spartina* Control Plan
Humboldt Bay Ecosystem-Based Management Program
Humboldt Bay Subtidal Habitat Goals Project
North Coast Riparian Restoration Evaluation

Watershed Restoration Plans
Austin Creek Watershed Restoration Program
Klamath River Corridor Plan
Mattole River Watershed Enhancement Activities
Navarro Watershed Restoration Plan

Fish Passage Barrier Assessment and Fish Habitat Restoration Plans
Humboldt Fish Passage Improvement Program
Five Counties Fish Passage Improvement
Caspar Creek Fish Passage Improvement
Pine Gulch Creek Instream Flow Protection

San Francisco Bay Area
San Francisco Baylands Ecosystem Habitat Goals Report: Climate Change Update
San Francisco Estuary Invasive *Spartina* Eradication Plan
Restoring the Estuary: An Implementation Strategy for the SF Bay Joint Venture
San Francisco Bay Subtidal Habitat Goals Report
Napa Historical Ecology Atlas
East Contra Costa County Historical Ecology Project

Watershed Restoration Plans
Bear Valley Creek Watershed Enhancement Plan
Big Break Marsh Creek Restoration and Stewardship
Eticuera Creek Watershed Restoration (Berryessa)
Green Valley Creek Watershed Assessment and Integrated Plan
Northern Tributaries to Upper Alameda Creek: Integrated Water Management Plan
San Geronimo Creek Enhancement Plan
Pinole Creek Watershed Planning and Design
San Pablo Bay Watershed Restoration Program
Suisun Creek Watershed Plan

Fish Passage Barrier Assessment and Fish Habitat Restoration Plans
San Francisco Estuary Fish Passage Improvement Program
San Francisco Estuary: Assessment of Anchor Watersheds for Fisheries

TABLE 2: Habitat Enhancement Plans, continued

Alameda Creek (Flows and Fish Passage Studies)
Napa River Fish Barrier Assessment and Restoration Plans
San Francisquito Creek Watershed Steelhead Recovery Plan

Central Coast
Integrated Watershed Restoration Program for Santa Cruz County
Elkhorn Slough Tidal Wetlands Strategic Plan
Morro Bay National Estuary Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan
Santa Maria River Estuary Enhancement Plan
Watsonville Slough Enhancement Plan

Watershed Restoration Plans
Arana Gulch Watershed Enhancement Plan
Arroyo Grande Creek Watershed Enhancement and Restoration Plan
Arroyo Seco Watershed Restoration Feasibility Study
Austin Creek Watershed Restoration Program
Carmel River Watershed Action Plan
Garrapata Creek Watershed Restoration
Gazos Creek Enhancement Watershed Plan
Lower Santa Ynez River Restoration Feasibility Study
Lower Santa Ynez River Watershed Enhancement Feasibility
Lower Pajaro River Watershed Enhancement Plan
Morro Bay Watershed Enhancement Plan
San Lorenzo River Urban River Plan, including Enhancement Plan
San Luis Obispo Creek Watershed Enhancement Plan
Santa Rosa Creek Watershed Conservation Plan
Soquel Creek Watershed Enhancement Plan

Fish Passage Barrier Assessment and Fish Habitat Restoration Plans
County of Santa Cruz Stream Crossing Inventory and Fish Passage Evaluation
Arroyo Hondo Creek Steelhead Habitat Enhancement Plan
Upper San Lorenzo River Salmonid Enhancement Plan

Southern California
Southern California Wetlands Recovery Project Regional Strategy
Southern California Coastal Wetlands Atlas
Ventura County Historical Ecology Study
Santa Monica Bay Restoration Plan
Ballona Creek Historic Ecology Study Feasibility Study for Restoration of Rocky Feasibility Study for Restoration of Rocky Intertidal Habitat in Santa Monica Bay
North San Diego County Coastal Wetlands Historical Ecology Study
San Diego Nearshore Habitat and Beach Nourishment Studies
Tijuana River Historical Ecology Project

TABLE 2: Habitat Enhancement Plans, continued

Watershed Restoration Plans
Southern California Watershed Inventory
Calleguas Creek Watershed Restoration
San Diego River Watershed Data Collection
Lower Rose Creek Watershed Assessment
Tijuana River Valley Invasive Plant Control Project

Fish Passage Barrier Assessment and Fish Habitat Restoration Plans
Santa Monica Mountains Steelhead Assessment

TABLE 3: Public Access Plans

Statewide
California Coastal Trail Plan
Coastal Trail in State Parks
California Recreational Trails Plan

North Coast
Klamath River Estuary Access Planning
Humboldt Bay Natural Areas Access Enhancement Project
Humboldt Bay Water Trail Implementation Program
Humboldt County Coastal Trail Implementation Program
Humboldt Bay Trail Feasibility Study
Mendocino Coastal Trail Plan
Mendocino Access Improvements Plan
Sonoma County Coastal Trail Plan

San Francisco Bay Area
San Francisco Bay Area Ridge Trail Plan
San Francisco Bay Trail Planning and Gap Analysis
San Francisco Bay Area Water Trail Plan
East Bay Greenway
The Great California Delta Trail Plan
Lake Berryessa Shoreline Trail

Central Coast
Santa Cruz County Master Coastal Trail Plan
Monterey Santa Cruz Rail to Rail Master Plan
Watsonville Trail Master Plan
N. San Luis Obispo County Coastal Trail Master Plan
Devereux Slough/Ellwood Mesa Regional Open Space and Development Master Plan

Southern California
Palos Verdes Peninsula Coastal Trail
San Diego River Trail Gap Inventory
Ventura River Parkway
Compton Creek Enhancement Feasibility Report
San Diego River Trail Gap Analysis
Southern San Diego County Coastal Access Vision Plan
Tijuana River Valley Habitat Restoration and Trail Program

TABLE 4: Climate Change Adaptation Plans

Statewide
Sea Level Rise: Coastal Infrastructure and Resources Impact Project
California Climate Change Adaaptation Strategy
State of California Sea Level Rise Guidance
California Landscape Conservation Cooperative Five Year Strategic Plan

North Coast
Humboldt Bay Shoreline Sea Level Rise Vulnerability Assessment

San Francisco Bay Area
San Francisco Baylands Habitat Ecosystems Goals Report: Climate Change Update
San Francisco Bay Wetland and Ecological Sea Level
Ocean Beach Managed Retreat Master Plan

Central Coast
Monterey Bay Sea Level Rise Vulnerability Assessment
Goleta Slough Sea Level Rise Vulnerability Assessment

Southern California
Coastal Storm Model for Southern California Bight

Grants to Update Local Coastal Programs to Plan for Sea Level Rise
(Funded by OPC, awarded 11/21/13, managed by Coastal Conservancy Staff)

- City of Eureka General Plan Update: Coastal Land Use Policy – Sea-level Rise Adaptation Strategies and Policies
- Sonoma County LCP Update: Sea-level Rise Assessment and Adaptation
- Collaborating on Sea-level Marin: Adaptation Response Team
- City of Half Moon Bay Local Coastal Program
- Collaborative Efforts to Assess Sea-level Rise Impacts and Evaluate Policy Options for the Monterey Bay Coast
- City of Morro Bay Sea-level Rise Vulnerability Assessment and Policy Framework
- Capacity Building and Information Acquisition for Sea-level Rise Planning in the Los Angeles Greater Metropolitan Region